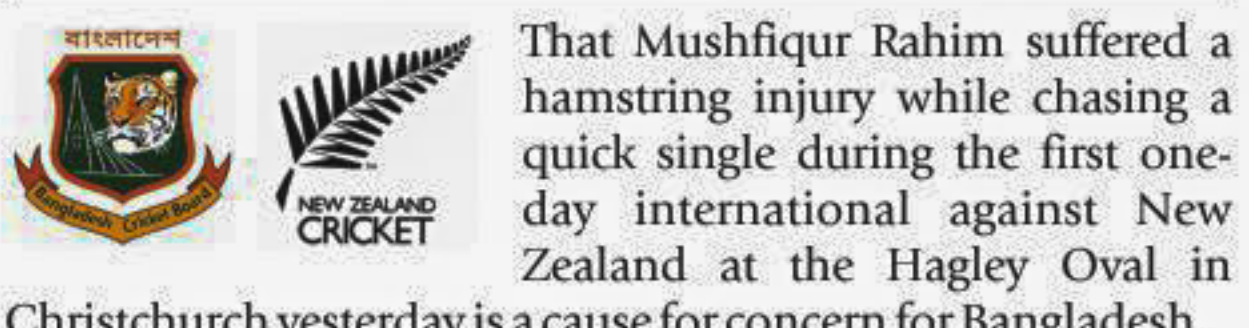




Shakib Al Hasan (second from R) and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (second from L) congratulate Mustafizur Rahman after the left-armer dismissed Martin Guptill early in the first ODI on Monday in Christchurch. Unfortunately for the Tigers, this was one of their rare good moments, as they struggled on the field.

Masseur arrives after injury

SPORTS REPORTER from Christchurch



That Mushfiquur Rahim suffered a hamstring injury while chasing a quick single during the first one-day international against New Zealand at the Hagley Oval in Christchurch yesterday is a cause for concern for Bangladesh. He is not only a key player of the team but also the Test captain who is scheduled to lead the Tigers in the two-match series after the conclusion of the ODI and T20 parts of a very demanding and gruelling series down under. He picked up that injury while diving at the non-striker's end to complete a run. The first impression everyone got when he was lying on the ground for quite awhile and waving at the dressing room for assistance was that there might be a bit of bruise. He was running smoothly before that and there was no symptom of any hamstring issue.

But after being treated by the Bangladesh team's new physio Dean Conway on the pitch, the right-hander started limping and finally decided to walk off the field after scoring 42. Later it was disclosed that he had a problem with his left hamstring, which is quite natural for a player. He will undergo a scan 48 hours after sustaining the injury and is currently undergoing ice-pack treatment.

Considered one of the fittest players in the team, Mushfiquur retired hurt once before, complaining of a cramp during a T20 International against Zimbabwe earlier this year. Although the absence of a masseur in the national team since the Tigers left for Australia on December 9 has nothing to do with his injury, it is still quite an interesting revelation that this important cog has not been included in an otherwise high-profile support staff.

Actually a masseur reached Christchurch yesterday. His name is Sohel and happens to be very popular with the players, understandably because he plays an important role in relaxing those tiring limbs. The board has recently roped in Englishman Conway till the 2019 World Cup, and his inclusion actually completed a highly professional support staff for the Tigers.

But the question is why the Bangladesh Cricket Board, for whom money is not an issue, failed to provide a masseur when the Tigers set off for Sydney after being involved in non-stop cricket for 45 days during the Bangladesh Premier League. That man may cost the board a penny considering the amount of money they are spending for a lot of purposes, but ignoring the importance of a fringe staff can have a contributing effect in damaging a now robust Tigers outfit.

Tigers come up short

AL-AMIN from Christchurch



The wicket was brown and it was the home team who feasted on a placid surface much to the delight of a full house at the Hagley Oval on Boxing Day. The Black Caps put on 341 for seven, their joint-highest score at this oval-shape ground, leaving Bangladesh a mountain to climb to salvage the first one-dayer of the three-match series in Christchurch yesterday. It was also New Zealand's highest score against Bangladesh, surpassing their previous best of 338, interestingly in the first ODI between the two teams in Sharjah in 1990.

Bangladesh, in their chase, scored 264 for nine in 44.5 overs. Apart from the 77-run defeat, the Tigers also suffered an injury blow to wicketkeeper-batsman and Test captain Mushfiquur Rahim, who limped off the ground with a hamstring injury after scoring 42.

Whether Mushfiquur, a key component of the team, will be able to recover before the second game in Nelson on December 29 is a burning question for the Tigers. However, they have other pressing issues they need to sort out after a match where they were not competitive in every aspect of the game.

It was no surprise when the home captain Kane Williamson won the toss and elected to bat. His decision was vindicated in the form of a record fifth-wicket stand of 158 between opener Tim Latham and middle-order batsman Colin Munro. Latham hit a magnificent 137 while Munro struck a fluent 87.

But this partnership was a bolt from the blue for the Tigers after the dismissal of the home side's two star batsmen -- opener Martin Guptill (15) and skipper Kane Williamson (31).

Left-arm pace bowler Mustafizur Rahman, on his comeback match, started well and dismissed Guptill, who became the latest victim of a Fizz cutter, ballooning an attempted whip to leg to mid off where Soumya Sarkar completed a good catch. Coming on as first change, Taskin had Williamson with a pitched-up delivery that the

right-hander edged to Mushfiquur behind the wicket. Bangladesh's all-season performer Shakib Al Hasan then dismissed Neil Broom (22) and James Neeshan (12), leaving the game in the balance.

But since then the game irrevocably headed the home side's way. There was no denying that Latham, the otherwise slow-going batsman in the New Zealand ranks, played a fabulous innings that contained seven fours and four sixes and Munro did what he knows best -- hitting the ball a long way. But the lack of necessary discipline in the Bangladesh pace bowling department also contributed to that monumental fifth-wicket stand.

Since the arrival of Mustafizur in the national team, he always played the role of go-to man for Mashrafe when the going gets tough. But his introduction for a second spell in the 34th over was very unproductive. He might have conceded two runs in his first over, but went for too many runs in his next two. Besides, he failed to give the breakthrough desperately needed at that time. Taskin also struggled with his line and length. Although Mashrafe used his world of experience to remain economical for his nine overs, the forced change of end in an attempt to accommodate Mustafizur to bowl with the wind completely backfired. Mashrafe conceded 17 runs in his last over.

Mustafizur was not at the top of his pace, which perhaps contributed to the ineffectiveness of his cutters. He will definitely improve in the coming days. But Taskin, as Mashrafe later pointed out, was short of ideas with all those bouncers smashed out of the park.

The ground fielding left a lot to be desired. And the catching was poor. Mahmudullah is one of the better fielders in the team but he dropped a sitter after covering the ground at the long-off boundary. Young Mosaddek Hossain dropped another easy catch and it has become quite customary for Mushfiquur to drop something in every game.

Before focusing on how Bangladesh batted, one riddle needs to be addressed. Is 341 a total too big in the context of the modern one-day game? The general notion is that it is too tough to chase down but if it creeps into the mind of a

team then it is not forward thinking. We will have to accept that the bowlers might have a bad day and the batting has to back it up on a placid wicket and on a ground like Hagley Oval. Considering the next two games in Nelson, where the Tigers are supposed to get more batting-friendly wickets, the Bangladesh cricket team will have to accept that they might be up against a similar score.

There were no demons in the Hagley Oval surface and the home side's two most lethal fast bowlers, Trent Boult and Tim Southee, perhaps got some undue respect early in the Bangladesh innings. A cautious approach is understandable but so many dot balls certainly did not help Bangladesh's cause.

Imrul Kayes was caught down the leg side while attempting a pull shot. It was however not the way he was dismissed that amused many but his decision to ask for a review, which was turned down by the third umpire. A batsman can be confused if he is adjudged leg before, but he is supposed to be the best person to know if a bouncer has brushed his bat or gloves, which it clearly did on this occasion.

I think the Bangladesh think-tank has come to a cardinal point to decide whether to continue with Soumya Sarkar or relegate him for some time after the way he got out -- a tame catch to mid-off from a totally confused batsman. Tamim Iqbal has done all the hard work for a 59-ball 38 but when it was about time to play catch up, he erred. Mahmudullah completed a forgettable day, unwisely slashing a wishy delivery.

Shakib scored a fluent 59 off 54 balls but got carried away when people started to believe that this might be the innings he would carry on till the end. Young Mosaddek played a superb knock, especially his clean hitting against the spinner was a treat to watch. But his maiden, unbeaten half-century was for a lost cause.

Before the start of the game a policeman, on duty at the main entrance of the venue, while responding to an enthusiastic Kiwi fan's remark that the match would be exciting said: "Yes, but it will be short."

And definitely the Tigers were on the shorter side yesterday.

BD-NZ SCOREBOARD					
NEW ZEALAND			R/B4s/6s		
Guptill c Soumya			15/19	1/1	
b Mustafizur					
Latham c Mushfiquir			137/121	7/4	
b Mustafizur					
Williamson c Mushfiquir			31/36	5/0	
b Taskin			22/32	0/0	
Broom lbw b Shakib			12/13	2/0	
Neesham lbw b Shakib			87/61	8/4	
Munro c Taskin b Shakib			5/6	0/0	
Ronchi b Taskin			8/7	0/0	
Santner not out			7/5	1/0	
Southee not out					
Extras: (b-6, lb-8, w-3)			341		
Total: (For 7 wickets in 50 overs)			17		
Did not bat: Ferguson, Boult.					
Fall of wickets: 1-31, 2-79, 3-134, 4-158, 5-316, 6-323, 7-327					
Bowler	O	M	R	W	
Mashrafe	10	0	61	0	
Mustafizur	10	0	62	2	
Taskin	9	0	70	2	
Shakib	10	0	69	3	
Soumya	4	0	25	0	
Mosaddek	7	0	40	0	
BANGLADESH			R/B 4s/6s		
Tamim c Santner b Neesham			38/59	5/0	
Imrul c Ronchi b Southee			16/21	2/1	
Soumya c Williamson					
b Neesham			1/8	0/0	
Mahmudullah c Ronchi					
b Neesham			0/3	0/0	
Shakib c Southee			59/54	5/2	
b Ferguson			42/48	3/0	
Mushfiquir retired hurt			16/11	0/1	
Sabbir c Boult b Ferguson			50/44	5/3	
Mosaddek not out			14/10	3/0	
Mashrafe c Broom b Santner			2/11	0/0	
Taskin c Ronchi b Ferguson			0/1	0/0	
Mustafizur b Southee					
Extras: (b-1, lb-6, w-18, nb-1)			26		
Total: (All out in 44.5 overs)			264		
Fall of wickets: 1-34, 2-48, 3-48, 4-81, 5-144, 6-167, 6-219, 7-242, 8-252, 9-264					
Bowler	O	M	R	W	
Boult	9	0	43	0	
Southee	9.5	2	63	2	
Ferguson	9	0	54	3	
Neesham	7	1	36	3	



Bangladesh wicketkeeper Mushfiquur Rahim limps off the ground after suffering a hamstring injury in Christchurch yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

PERFORMER OF THE DAY

TOM LATHAM

It was Kane Williamson who was supposed to be the danger man for the Bangladeshis. However, against all the odds, Tom Latham turned out to be the destroyer. He hammered his highest ever score in ODIs, 137 off 121 balls, and left Bangladesh's players clueless. He hit four sixes and seven fours. The best part about his innings was the way he hooked, pulled and smashed anything that was a bit short for fours and sixes. Throughout his innings he never seemed vulnerable to the short ball. Bangladesh will hope they can counter his flicks in the rest of the series.

Bruce, Wheeler in NZ T20 squad

REUTERS, Christchurch

Uncapped batsman Tom Bruce has been called into New Zealand's Twenty20 squad for their three-match series against Bangladesh next month, while left-arm pace bowler Ben Wheeler has been recalled to the national side.

The right-handed Bruce would provide a powerful hitting lineup for New Zealand with the aggressive Martin Guptill, Colin Munro and Colin de Grandhomme and Corey Anderson, who has been selected solely as a batsman.

Wheeler played six one day internationals last year but not been picked for New Zealand since. He has been brought into the side with Tim Southee being rested for the entire series, while Trent Boult will miss the first game in Napier on January 3.

'Bowling lax, fielding lethargic'

SPORTS REPORTER from Christchurch



Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza said had the bowling been disciplined and the fielding up to the mark the first one-day international against New Zealand could have been a closely-fought game.

"We have conceded 40 to 50 runs due to some lax bowling. The fielding was also lethargic. If we could have contained them close to 290 it could have been a different story," Mashrafe said in the post-match briefing after his side's 77-run defeat against the Black Caps at the Hagley Oval in Christchurch today.

New Zealand rode on a magnificent 137 by opener Tim Latham to post a massive 341 for seven, their highest score against Bangladesh. The Tigers, in their chase, posted 264 for nine in 44.4 overs with young batsman Mosaddek Hossain hitting an unbeaten 50 off 44 balls.

His innings could not progress further after Mushfiquur Rahim, who limped off the ground with a left hamstring injury after scoring 42, did not return to bat. "Mushfiquur has suffered hamstring

injury on his left thigh. At the moment he is getting ice bag treatment. We will have a scan after 48 hours," Mashrafe said about his key wicketkeeper-batsman and Bangladesh's Test captain.

"Our pace bowlers did not bowl well; especially their short deliveries were meant to be hit because they were bowling above the waist-height when it should have been a bit higher in these conditions. Besides, we also did not field well," said the skipper, adding that Latham played very well.

"He actually took the game away from us with [Colin] Munro. It was against them our plan did not work," Mashrafe admitted.

When asked to comment on the performance of Mustafizur Rahaman, the young pace sensation who was playing his first game after six months due to a shoulder injury, Mashrafe said that he was still recovering.

"His cutters were not effective from the end he was bowling. Since he was being hit with the wind a few miss-hits off his cutters sailed over the boundary. So, we tried him from the other end. He looked good and will improve with every game," the captain said about his lethal weapon.

Despite being up against a huge task of toppling New Zealand's score, Mashrafe believed that they were still in the game when Shakib Al Hasan was batting.

"Shakib was batting very well and with Mushfiquur with him we had a chance. The target was to reach 170 by the end of 35 overs. Unfortunately he got out and Sabbir (Rahman) also failed to score," said Mashrafe.

Bangladesh played eight batsmen and four specialist bowlers including Shakib Al Hasan yesterday. When asked if the team had thought about taking an extra bowler in the team, Mashrafe said: "I think there are problems both ways. Had we bowled a bit better as a group, we could have won the game. Yes, it could have been better if we had an extra bowler, but then again it's something difficult to predict."

Despite the poor performance on the field, Mashrafe managed to find a positive angle. "Our performance was a bit alarming. But it was good to see our batsmen fight it out despite losing wickets early in the game. We were in a difficult position but our batsmen still tried," said Mashrafe.

Mash, Tigers fined

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have been fined for maintaining a slow over-rate against New Zealand during the first ODI yesterday. Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and co were ruled to be one over short of its target when time allowances were taken into consideration.

In accordance with Article 2.5.1 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, players are fined 10 per cent of their match fees for every over their side fails to bowl in the allotted time, with the captain fined double that amount.

As such, Mashrafe has been fined 20 per cent of his match fee, while his players have received 10 per cent fines. Mashrafe pleaded guilty to the offence and accepted the proposed sanction, so there was no need for a formal hearing.